



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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The Masquerade Is Over

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

You've seen the television shows that "makeover" people so they are hardly recognizable even to those who know them. Experts are brought in to choose just the right clothes, hairstyle, and makeup for them. They look and even act like different people. Paul says that sometimes Satan does the same thing—he "...transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). It's a clear warning to those of us who think we know him. But we need to take this a little farther to see it in our current culture.

What do you suppose an "angel of light" is like? In Scripture, light is a consistent metaphor for the pure nature of God and the way of righteousness (1 Tim. 6:16; Jas. 1:17; 1 Jn. 1:5). Darkness is the way of sin from which we have been called "...into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). So, an "angel of light" would be a "messenger" or someone who presents himself as being consistent with the nature of God and the way of righteousness and one who claims and appears to be in "His marvelous light." It is someone who is an advocate for the things of "light" (righteousness and truth) over the things of "darkness" (sin and error).

So, the obvious point of 2 Corinthians 11:14 is that things aren't always as they appear. False apostles and deceitful workers don't always wear black hats. It's an old trick: "...as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). Now this may state the obvious, but Satan only needs to masquerade himself and his ways when people are truly interested in the light and in avoiding darkness. Just how hard does he have to try to disguise himself today?

Do we think nothing of letting Satan

enter our houses through our TV's and portray fornication in front of us? Where is the masquerade? Do we laugh over Satan's silly drunken behavior? Do we accept his greed and covetousness and selfish ambitions as success and happiness? Where is the deception? When lewdness is style, lies are the "loving" thing, and heresies are just being politically correct, Satan doesn't even need to wear a mask. Why would Satan pretend to bear the fruit of the Spirit when the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-23) are the accepted norm?

It should come as a shock to us that Satan generally need not mask himself among us, but it gets worse. If Satan were to disguise himself as an angel of light, it would likely seriously harm his influence today. Angels of light are not popular on TV or in the movies. Angels of light are not generally elected to government office. Angels of

light are not tolerated long in pulpits. Angels of light seem boring on dates or backward, weird, judgmental, or hateful.

Look at Satan. The mask is off and he is not hiding. Pure evil is before us. We must not harden our hearts (Heb. 3:8, 13) or allow our consciences to be seared (1 Tim. 4:2). Actively "Set your mind on things above, not on the things on earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:2-4). Satan is not afraid to show himself in our world today. Look at him and his filthy, evil, death-filled world. Look at Jesus and His pure, righteous, eternal life-filled kingdom. Take a good, long look. The masquerade is over. The choice is clear.

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We've all heard of and been warned about "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matt. 7:15), but do we recognize the absurdity of *sheep* in *wolves'* clothing? When Jesus told His disciples, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matt. 10:16), He never intended that His sheep imitate wolves.

Borrowing Jesus' illustration, suppose a sheep, in order to survive, dressed up as a wolf (thinking wolves would leave him alone). To truly convince the wolves, he would have to occasionally kill a lamb. The shepherd, judging from the actions of the "acting" sheep, would kill him. The moral: *Sheep better act like sheep and Christians better act like Christ.*

SHEEP IN WOLVES' CLOTHING

By AL DIESTELKAMP

One is not truly a Christian simply because he believed and was baptized. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:16).

Jesus has called us to be different from the world and to appear different from the worldly.

Are we acting like sheep, following the lead of our loving Shepherd, or do our actions disguise us as wolves?

THE BEST WORK WE CAN DO

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

This past November my cousin David and I returned to Sierra Leone and rendezvoused there with Sunday Ayandare of Nigeria. This was my fifth three-week journey to this impoverished country since 2011. (We had to skip a couple of years when Sierra Leone was at the center of the ebola epidemic). This country is only about the size of South Carolina, but it is not particularly easy to travel about because of the poor infrastructure. We have primarily worked in Bo, the country's second largest city. Bo is a four-hour drive from the airport in Lungi which is located on the Atlantic coast just north of the capital city of Freetown. Sierra Leone is just seven degrees north of the equator. The tropical climate quickly saps us northerners of our energy.

The average American would be shocked and depressed by the degree of poverty that he would observe there. Most Americans and many Sierra Leonians assume that our "missionary work" is benevolent (digging wells, building hospitals, etc.). Indeed, many people believe this is the best good that could be done for such a poor people. Missionary societies have been sending white men there for centuries to address social problems; but what this nation needs is what every nation needs—a good dose of the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the truly best work that can be done.

The desire to address people's social needs first as a means of cultivating the soil of their hearts for spiritual planting will always be there. It becomes all the more tempting when the disparity between economies is so great. Alleviating immediate individual needs is often relatively affordable on a case-by-case basis. However, my grandfather did a lot of work in Nigeria in the 50's and 60's and noted in his autobiography that "The argument is made that 'We have to heal their bodies before we can save their souls,' or 'You can't preach salvation to starving people.'" His response to this rationale was, "Pure, unadulterated truth will save souls, whether they be hungry, sick or ignorant. More or less than that pure truth may fill church buildings and may win the applause of men, but it will not put names [in] the book of life." A more modern aphorism is, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Is this why the people rejected all of God's prophets from Abel to Zechariah as they labored to present the Word of God and get people to repent? No, indeed, the

people rejected God's prophets because the people did not want to repent and return to God's ways.

I believe we should have compassion (and we do); but it is not compassionate to systematically offer a social gospel as the prerequisite to hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, offering a social gospel creates all kinds of problems which inevitably result from cultivating a love of money and material things and leads to jealousies, rivalries, corruption, heresies, and every other evil thing. In the end, the prioritization of social and economic needs above spiritual needs does not truly convert people to Jesus Christ but rather to an ostensibly benevolent organization which, in the long run, makes and keeps the recipients dependent on "the system."

We could make some applications of this truth to politics within our own country. However, our work is spiritual, not political. We find that these people—who are in the depths of poverty—are willing to sit for hours in a "coffee shop" (picture a frame of wooden poles covered in corrugated metal) listening to the reading of Scripture and dis-

cussing its implications for our lives. The social problems in all countries could begin to be addressed much more effectively if people would first truly submit to Jesus as Lord. My hope for Sierra Leone is that at least people there will patiently listen to and discuss the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am not certain that Americans sitting in a Starbucks would give me three minutes of their attention, let alone three hours.

What are your greatest concerns for you, your family, and your nation? Do these concerns revolve around having economic prosperity, social justice, and equality for all? I suggest that our greatest concerns must be spiritual and that true hope is grounded in the truth of God's Word which offers salvation to all, regardless of this life's circumstances. Our faith must not be in democracy, capitalism, patriotism, social programs, denominations, or missionary societies. Our faith must be in Jesus Christ and the message He sent into all the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15,16; Ac. 2:14-39, etc.).

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Commitment in Marriage

By **STEVE FONTENOT**

Divorce undeniably spells "failed marriage." But what of those marriages where the rule is unhappiness? While they may stay together, is this relationship what God intended?

Commitment affects the success or failure of a marriage—not simply a commitment to stay together but a *commitment to be what God wants a husband or wife to be*. It is one thing to be a "wife" because you were joined in a covenant of marriage; it is quite another to be a "helper suitable" for one's husband (Gen. 2:18). It takes more than a piece of paper and a ring to be a "companion." A companion is one who shares one's life, dispelling loneliness, sharing burdens, and providing mental, social, physical, and spiritual (Lk 2:52) camaraderie which "corresponds" (Gen. 2:18, NASB footnote) to the unique individual to whom one is pledged. Likewise, commitment to "cleave" to a wife involves more than bringing home the beans or just being home. Plopping down in front of

the TV, burying oneself in a newspaper, or going out to pursue one's hobbies when your wife has looked forward all day to conversation, attention, and affection from her mate is hardly reflective of one who understands and is committed to being a loving companion.

Husbands, are you *committed* to "love your wives as Christ also loved the church" (Eph 5:25) and "live with your wives in an understanding way...and grant her honor..." (1 Pet. 3:7)? Wives, are you *committed* to "respecting" (Eph. 5:31) your husband in his solemn role as leader of your family, striving to "do him good and not evil all the days of your life" (Prov. 31:12)? Are you *committed* to meeting one another's sexual needs and interests (1 Cor. 7:1-5)?

Haphazard, lazy, selfish attitudes and conduct will not produce successful marriages. You may not divorce, but *without commitment to the love, service, and honor of one another, your marriage will "fail" to reach the potential God intended.*

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That We Would Not Trust In Ourselves

By RICK LIGGIN

“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope” (2 Cor. 1:8-10).

I would not for one moment begin to compare the struggles of my life with those of the apostle Paul. He certainly faced (on more than one occasion) excessive burdens which threatened, not only his personal peace, but even his physical life. And this is most especially true of the time he was in Asia which he refers to in our text (cf. Ac. 19:1ff). It was a truly difficult time for the apostle Paul, so I know that my struggles pale in significance when compared to the apostle’s. But for me, in my own little world, especially over the last year or so, I have come to identify with the apostle and his ever-increasing awareness that we cannot trust in ourselves but must trust in the living God who raises the dead.

The year 2017 has been a tough year, one of the toughest of my life in my work as a preacher and especially in my efforts to be a spiritual leader. It’s not important that you know the exact nature of the trial that we in our local congregation have suffered through together since November of last year, but it is important that you know that it has been, at least for us, a tough experience to endure. It’s been a time in which we have felt “excessively burdened, beyond our strength”; a time in which we have known real despair and ugly discouragement; a time of uncertainty and doubt. But what is most important for you to know is that, during this past year, God has shown me that I must not trust in myself but in Him.

What’s so unnerving about it all, though, is this: I thought—I really believed—I was putting my trust in God! And I did trust Him; I really did depend on Him. But I didn’t realize how much I was actually *also* trusting in me...in my own ability and in my own wisdom. It took the difficulties of this past year to make me see just how much I was really doing this. Indeed, through the difficulties of this past year, my good God has patiently taught me not to trust in me but to trust *fully* in Him! When you find yourself in tears on your knees by your bed, with only your good wife kneel-

ing next to you, and you’re crying out, “Father, I don’t know what to do! I don’t know what to do!” that’s when you realize how totally inadequate you are and how much you desperately need Him.

When our awful trial raised its ugly head a little over a year ago, it shook me to my core...and I was scared! I knew that those around me were going to need wise spiritual leadership to get through it...and I was scared! I was scared about a lot of things, but I was mostly scared that as a spiritual leader, I didn’t know enough and wasn’t wise enough and didn’t have enough endurance to help us through this awful, ugly struggle. I began to really doubt myself: my ability to lead, my ability to exercise good judgment, and my ability to make the right choices. But God has taught me through all these events (and through some good spiritual brothers and sisters) that He is not limited by my failure to always “get it right” or to make all the right decisions and all the right choices. He has taught me that if we—His servants—put our trust in Him and do our best to follow His revealed Word, no matter how hard it might be...if we will diligently make a good faith effort to really “get it right,” all the while being humble enough to acknowledge and correct any mistakes, then He can make it all work out right, no matter how badly we might fumble it!

Jesus’ own twelve apostles were all flawed men—men who were full of faults and weaknesses and failings and they didn’t always “get it right!,” but they were committed to Him and to living in an unbending way by His sure and steadfast Word. Starting with these twelve flawed men, Christ turned the world upside down in one generation with the gospel of His grace! I have learned over this past year in ways more practical than I ever imagined that we serve a God who can take tragedy and turn it to triumph! He has the ability to turn the tables on Satan and use his own devilish works against him to accomplish good (Ac. 8:1-4; Phil. 1:12-18; Jas. 1:2-4; Rom. 5:1-5). I have learned that in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength (cf. 2 Chron. 14:11), in the battle that seemingly cannot be won, our God can conquer and win anyway! All it takes is for His people to believe in Him, to trust Him...to trust Him enough to follow Him no matter what.

I am *not* thankful for the tragic trial that we have had to face this last year. It has torn apart families; it has broken people; and souls have been lost—and it is not yet really over! So, no, I am not thankful for

these difficult events. I truly hope that what happened here among us never happens again...anywhere. But even though I am not thankful for the trial itself, I am thankful for the lessons my good God and Father has taught me in these events. Events like these are allowed to occur “so that we will not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.” And in His good time and in His own way, He “will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope.” Indeed, I have learned that our God is good, always good, no matter what. And I am determined to trust Him. I hope you will, too.

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HIS EXAMPLE



Edgar A. Guest

There are little eyes upon you,
and they're watching night and day;
There are little ears that quickly
take in every word you say;
There are little hands all eager
to do everything you do,
And a little boy that's dreaming
of the day he'll be like you.

You're the little fellow's idol,
you're the wisest of the wise;
In his little mind about you
no suspicions ever rise;
He believes in you devoutly,
holds that all you say and do
He will say and do in your way
when he's grown up just like you.

Oh, it sometimes makes me shudder
when I hear my boy repeat
Some careless phrase I've uttered
in the language of the street;
And it sets my heart to grieving
when some little fault I see
And I know beyond all doubting
that he picked it up from me.

There's a wide-eyed little fellow
who believes you're always right,
And his ears are always open
and he watches day and night;
You are setting an example
every day in all you do
For the little boy who's waiting
to grow up to be like you.

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Bill McBryde, AR	\$ 200.00
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TOTAL DONATIONS	\$ 350.00
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THE GIFT OF SELF

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Relationships are all about giving and receiving. We live in a selfish environment in which receiving is often valued above giving—this, despite our Lord's statement, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Ac. 20:35). When we think of giving, too often we think of giving "things" when really the best gift is the giving of self. As a French proverb says, "He gives nothing who does not give himself."

Jesus is the prime example of a selfless giver. What an understatement it was when the apostle Paul wrote, "He gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8). Each use of His miraculous power, His compassion, His mercy, and His life was a gift of part of Him. Notice how many times Jesus' use of His powers was prompted by His compassion as He saw the plight of the unfortunate.

Perhaps the primary purpose of His miracles was to prove who He was and to confirm the word that He taught, but He could have done this in other ways. When He saw the sick, "He was moved with compassion for them, and He healed their sick" (Matt. 14:14). When two blind men called

out to Him for mercy, "Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes" (Matt. 20:34). In healing a man with leprosy—one who, according to the Law of Moses, was not to be touched—"Jesus, moved with compassion, put out His hand and touched him" (Mk. 14:41). Observing a widow who was grieving over the loss of her only son, "He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep'" before raising the young man from the dead (Lk. 7:13). Jesus' feeding of thousands with a few loaves and fishes was prompted by "compassion on the multitude" because they had followed Him for days with nothing to eat (Matt. 15:32).

Even Jesus' teaching was prompted by His compassion. "And Jesus, when He came out, saw the multitude and was moved with compassion for them because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things" (Mk. 6:34).

As His disciples, we need to learn the art of giving ourselves away. The marvelous thing about the giving of oneself is that it will result in us being blessed for doing so. There's a "reward" which comes from personal sacrifice. "He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will

have many curses" (Prov. 28:27). Even Jesus is rewarded for His giving of Himself. Each time a sinner accepts His redemptive gift of salvation, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God" (Lk. 15:10). Each first day of the week glory is given to Jesus as we gather with other Christians to "proclaim the Lord's death" (1 Cor. 11:26).

Most of us are involved in a number of relationships, all of which provide ample opportunity for us to give ourselves away.

Whenever there is giving, there is also receiving. When we are in genuine need of help, we must be willing to allow others to give of themselves to us. This may require the receiver to swallow pride in order to accept help. To refuse help when it is needed is to deny others of the reward they receive from giving of themselves.

However, neither should we be satisfied to always be on the receiving end. We need to "pass it forward." Then, and only then, will we experience the truth of our Lord's statement, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." One of the greatest barriers to contentment in this life is our reluctance to make sacrifices for the good of others and particularly for the good of Christ and His church. Try giving yourself away!